

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OPR-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE GUATEMALA 4592

E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJ: PROTEST MARCH BROKEN UP

1. BEGIN UNCLAS. SUMMARY. DEMONSTRATORS PROTESTING ALLEGED REPRESSION HELD UNAUTHORIZED MARCH DOWNTOWN AUGUST 4. DESPITE REPEATED GOG WARNINGS, LATE AFTERNOON CROWDS WERE SURPRISED BY POLICE INTERVENTION. MANY HAD TO BE TREATED FOR GAS INHALATION. POLICE AND DEMONSTRATORS DISAGREE OVER NUMBER ARRESTED. THIS IS FIRST TIME AUTHORITIES HAVE CLASHED WITH URBAN DEMONSTRATORS SINCE LAST SEPTEMBER'S INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION TURNED INTO RIOT. ORGANIZERS POINTEDLY REFUSED TO ASK FOR MARCH PERMIT. LUCAS GOVERNMENT HAS MADE ISSUE OF REQUIREMENT TO OBTAIN AUTHORIZATION, PRESUMABLY PART OF ITS CURRENT "LAW AND ORDER" CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY.

2. THE TWO THOUSAND OR SO DEMONSTRATORS (WORKERS, STUDENTS, CAMPESINOS, RELIGIOUS GROUPS) WHO ASSEMBLED AUGUST 4 TO PROTEST DEATHS OF LABOR LEADER MUJIA (GUATEMALA 4367), FATHER LOPEZ
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(GUATEMALA 3882), AND OTHER ACTS OF ALLEGED REPRESSION REPORTEDLY SWELLED TO TWELVE THOUSAND BEFORE RIOT SQUAD INTERVENED AND BROKE UP THE MARCH. POLICE CLAIMED THEY HAD WARNED CROWDS WITH LOUDSPEAKERS THAT MARCH WAS ILLEGAL AND WOULD BE STOPPED. WHEN MARCHERS APPROACHED POLICE LINES SEVERAL BLOCKS FROM STARTING POINT, POLICE LAUNCHED TEAR GAS CANNISTERS. VENDORS AND SHOPPERS (MANY WOMEN WITH SMALL CHILDREN) ACCUSTOMED TO

DEMONSTRATIONS WENT ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS AND WERE CAUGHT BY SURPRISE WHEN POLICE MOVED TO BREAK UP MARCHERS. (THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME POLICE AND DEMONSTRATORS HAVE CLASHED SINCE LAST SEPTEMBER'S INDEPENDENCE DAY, WHEN THE CELEBRATION TURNED INTO A RIOT AND POLICE CHARGED INTO THE CROWD.) POLICE CARRIED ONLY CLUBS AND TEARGAS. INJURIES ON BOTH SIDES WERE LIMITED TO CUTS AND BRUISES. THERE WAS NO GUNFIRE.

3. THERE HAS BEEN A GOOD DEAL OF POST-MARCH CONFUSION. INITIAL POLICE BULLETIN DENIED THERE HAD BEEN DEATHS, HOSPITALIZATIONS, OR ARRESTS. CHIEF OF POLICE LATER ADMITTED ARRESTS, AND POLICE HAVE NAMED FIVE MARCHERS CURRENTLY DETAINED. THOSE ARRESTED HAVE BEEN ACCUSED OF INSULTING POLICE AND THROWING OBJECTS AT THEM. UNION (CNT) LEADERS STATED THE NUMBER OF ARRESTED WAS CLOSER TO FIFTY, INCLUDING MANY CAMPESINOS. THEY HAVE NAMED A NUMBER OF MISSING PERSONS AND STATED THAT EFFORTS TO LOCATE THEM IN JAILS HAVE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL. POLICE SOURCES INDICATE THAT SOME PERSONS INITIALLY DETAINED WERE PROMPTLY RELEASED. THERE ARE NO RECORDED DEATHS, AND RED CROSS OFFICIALS HAVE STATED THAT THEY HAVE TREATED NO WOUNDED, ONLY GAS INHALATION CASES. HOSPITALS, HOWEVER, REPORT A NUMBER OF SERIOUS RESPIRATORY CASES ON HAND. IT APPEARS THAT THE USE OF TEAR GAS HAD BEEN GENEROUS (REPORTEDLY SOME 750 CANNIERS). NEWSPAPER REPORTERS, AS WELL AS OTHER ONLOOKERS, SUFFERED FROM THE SOMEWHAT INDISCRIMINATE DISTRIBUTION. END UNCLASSIFIED.

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4. COMMENT: BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. GOVERNMENT REACTION CONTRASTS WITH PERMISSIVENESS OF THE LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION ON SIMILAR OCCASIONS. IN THE PAST WHEN DEMONSTRATIONS WERE ANNOUNCED, THE GOVERNMENT INSISTED THAT PERMISSION BE SOUGHT, AND IN ABOUT HALF THE CASES, ORGANIZERS ACCEDED. WE KNOW OF NO RECENT INSTANCES OF PERMISSION BEING REFUSED, ALTHOUGH ON OCCASION THE GOVERNMENT HAS TRIED TO REROUTE MARCHES. HOWEVER, EVEN WHEN PERMISSION WAS NOT OBTAINED THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT ENFORCE THREATS TO INTERVENE -- UNTIL NOW. THE GOVERNMENT NOTES THAT ALTHOUGH THE CONSTITUTION GUARANTEES THE RIGHT TO PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY, IT HAS THE RIGHT TO REGULATE DEMONSTRATIONS TO INSURE ORDER AND TO PROTECT PROPERTY. THIS IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED, ALTHOUGH UNIVERSITY STUDENT GROUPS, UNION OFFICIALS, THE COMMITTEE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE, AND SOME POLITICAL LEADERS (DCG) ARE NOW SAYING THAT THE CONSTITUTION IS ALL THE AUTHORITY NEEDED TO DEMONSTRATE PEACEABLY. THE GOVERNMENT HAS REAFFIRMED ITS POSITION, WHICH IS CONSISTENT WITH ITS CURRENT "LAW AND ORDER" CAMPAIGN; DEMONSTRATION ORGANIZERS ARE PRESENTLY CONSIDERING NEXT STEPS.

BOSTER

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